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by

Caroline Abbot Stanley

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"'THIS IS MR. AND MRS. MAXON, ISN'T IT?'"

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THEIR CHRISTMAS GOLDEN WEDDING

BY

CAROLINE ABBOT STANLEY

AUTHOR OF "THE FIRST CHURCH'S CHRISTMAS BARREL," "A MODERN MADONNA," ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
EMLEN McCONNELL

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Their Christmas Golden Wedding

I

IT was early in the afternoon of Christmas Eve, so early, indeed, that anxious children looking from the bare ground to the lowering sky hoped against hope there might yet be time for a snowfall that would insure the coming of the reindeer.

A man and a woman whose shortening steps told the tale of lengthening years plodded along the board walk of the village street, which was beginning now to take on the aspect of a country lane, so far apart were the houses and so broad the old-fashioned yards and

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garden spaces between. The man was in advance, the woman following as she had done for fifty years.

No sign was apparent out here of the festive season, if we may except the savory odors that issued from kitchens here and there. The woman stopped once and hungrily sniffed the air. Those odors appealed to her far more than did the holly wreaths that her married daughter with whom she now lived had hung in her parlor windows yesterday in token of the day. Sudden moisture sprang to her eyes. The spicy smell of the mince pies and the frying doughnuts brought back to her her own kitchen and the Christmas Eves that had dropped into the abysm which engulfs the years when we are done

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with them. Once more she was the general making ready for the morrow's fray,—planning, directing, executing, as one who knows that upon her depends the success of the day. They all looked to her! And she had never failed them,—she was glad to remember that; she wondered a little if they remembered it, too. How necessary she was to them then! How close they were to her, always "under foot," waiting for the last spoonful of batter or the first fried cake. A lump rose in her throat as she thought of the old saying about children's treading on the mother's toes when they were little and on her heart when they were grown up. But she choked back the thought loyally. "They are good children," she

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whispered to herself with unsteady lips, "they are good children."

The old man walking on ahead turned. He, too, was stirred by the Christmas scent.

"Smells good, Mother."

"Don't it, now!" she said cheerfully, surreptitiously brushing her cheek. "It smells like old times!"

And they trudged on.

The man's bearing, even at seventy-five, was that of one who had carried a musket. The tri-colored button and the saber cut on his face were not needed to proclaim him a veteran. As for the woman, slight of stature, wrinkled of face, bowed with the weight of household burdens and the bearing and rearing of children, she also looked the

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old soldier (in the feminine), and bore battle scars no less marked than his, no less honorable, no less worthy of a Nation's gratitude; though they did not entitle her to the tri-color—nor a pension.

They turned in at a picket gate, which fell prone as the man touched it.

"Humph!" he said. That was all, but it was significant. It was their own place, which had been rented out, and they were coming back to it after a year's absence.

At the door, after they had knocked, they stood and looked around them. It was a low, weather-beaten house, with old-fashioned many-paned windows. A shutter near them hung by one hinge. The man surveyed it gloomily.

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"Everything is going to rack! All that needs is a screw!"

His wife was looking out at an elm outlined against the gray sky and did not answer. "We put it out that first fall," she was thinking. "It would be hard to uproot it now!"

No one answered the knock, but from the adjoining house a woman hurried toward them, wiping her hands on her apron as she came.

"Good morning! This is Mr. and Mrs. Maxon, isn't it? Yes, I was sure it was, though I've moved in next door here since you went away, and I didn't know for certain. Walk right in. Mrs. Dobson has gone to the depot and she asked me to watch out for you."

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"She sent for me," the old man began, but the woman broke in.

"Yes, she told me she did. She couldn't find your son-in-law. I guess he's out of town. She's mighty flustered about it all." She did not say what, nor did they ask, the man being by nature reticent and the woman never taking the initiative when he was present.

"She's got the house in perfect order," commented the neighbor. "You wouldn't know you hadn't been living here right along, would you?"

"It looks nice," admitted Mrs. Maxon, looking at the photographs on the walls,—"and natural."

"Yes. She took down your pictures when she came here, but she's got 'em

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all up again." Then, seeing vague uneasiness in the visitor's face, "They are hung right, ain't they?"

"She's got Johnnie wrong. He belongs on the other side. The worsted wreath ought to be where he is."

"She'll change 'em," the neighbor reassured her. "She said she wanted you should find everything just as it was."

Mrs. Maxon wondered vaguely why, but her eyes had gone back to Johnnie's prim little figure and the rest of the photographs, and she could not trust herself to reply. Over between the front windows, in a flamboyant frame, was the enlarged picture of the daughter that died—her "baby girl." She had been married just under where the picture hung; and it was there she

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lay in her wedding dress with the little baby in her arms a year later. Mrs. Maxon turned her face away from the stranger.

"If you'll excuse me," said that lady, who had been fidgeting slightly, "I'll leave you now. I am in the midst of my baking. Make yourselves at home. Look the house all over—you'll want to, of course, if— But she will tell you about that."

When she was gone, the woman turned to her husband. "What do you suppose it is that Mrs. Dobson wants?"

"Repairs, I suppose. That's what renters generally want."

They fell into silence again, which was scarcely broken by Mrs. Maxon's tiptoing to the bedroom door and

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looking in. It was just as she had left it. There was the marble-topped walnut set she had gone to housekeeping with. She stepped inside, and the touch laid on the bed was almost a caress. She was experiencing that strange sense of companionship that a woman feels at sight of her own "things," after separation from them. She shut the door softly. Holy memories were surging about her. This was her bridal chamber. In it she had looked into the face of her first-born and held him to her breast, feeling the mysterious, ecstatic thrill of motherhood. Every child she had borne had seen the light in this room. It was here that little Mattie had died. She went back and sat down weakly. Such

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memories make of commonplace rooms a shrine.

The veteran looked into her face and slowly shook his head. "We ought never to have done it, Mother. It was a mistake. We ought not to have broken up."

"They did it for the best, Father," she said tremulously. "We have good children."

"Ye-es,—they are good children. But they don't understand. They won't until they are old! and it will be too late for us then."

"Oh, Father! try not to take it so hard! We must bend to the Lord's will."

"It's not the Lord's will!" he said testily. "There's a lot of things laid

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on the Lord that He ain't responsible for. You ought not to have give in to them, Mother!"

"They said it was for the best," she repeated feebly. "And you know I never was any hand to stand up against anybody. I've always depended on you."

He answered with increasing bitterness. "It's hard for a body's home to be taken from him because he is sick and can't stand up for himself! And it wasn't old folks' sickness, either! If it had been paralysis, now!—but anybody can have typhoid! They oughtn't to have done it! I've taken care of you for fifty years, Mother, and you have taken care of me. We could have done

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it a few years longer. That's all it will be."

"Oh, Father!" she said again.

"If I had the money I put into John's education,"—his voice growing hard,—"it would keep us the rest of the time. And we'd be together. But now— It ain't right, Mother!"

"It isn't because John's not thankful, Father. He told me once he owed you a debt of gratitude he could never repay."

"He owes me money," the old man said sharply; "and he owes it to both of us. He can't pay it to me and leave you out. You scrimped and saved for that college money, same as I did. Sometimes I think we'd better have kept it."

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"No, Father, no! John is a great man now. They look up to him in the city."

"Yes, and where are we? Farmed out, one to one child and one to another. It ain't right!"

The lump in her throat was too big now for her to answer.

"I'll get some wood," he said, and went out.

She followed him as far as the dining-room, pausing to lay a caressing hand on the table with its folded leaves and oil-cloth cover. She had needed its full capacity once, remembering which she swallowed hard and went on to the kitchen. This, after all, was her holy of holies, for she had had a life of toil and it had been mainly

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here. She looked about her with eyes that saw but dimly. If only she could get her hands on things once more!

She was smarting a little over one of those periodical defeats she suffered at the hands of her oldest daughter, Sally, with whom she lived. This time it was about the dessert for to-morrow's Christmas dinner, when Father would be here and John was coming down from the city. She had wanted mince pies, because John liked them; but Sally (and that after asking her advice, too) had decided on plum pudding.

Indignation dried the moisture in her eyes and she looked around her with interest. Everything was just as she had left it. She could go in

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here and be at home in five minutes. Oh, if she only could! If they were only back to stay, and never had to go away again! Father was right. They ought never to have done it. The scanty, hard-wrung drops of age rolled down her face and dropped on her best black silk waist. Father was so unhappy!

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II

IT is small wonder she was homesick. They had lived here fifty years save one,—this last dreary year of enforced absence,—and fifty years is long enough for the rootlets of a human heart to take deep hold. They had expected to live and die here until that dreadful illness of Father's that changed everything. They had always hoped to go out of life together,—Father had prayed for it many a time as they knelt side by side after the children were all gone. Father had been a master hand at prayer; she had always believed his petitions would be answered. And now—the drops

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came faster—they were separated even in this life; and Father would not so much as ask a blessing! *That* separation seemed to her almost more awful than the one from herself.

And why were they separated, you ask?

It was a sad little tale that may be briefly sketched. It began with the veteran's illness nearly a year ago,—an illness that taxed the strength and nerves of his married daughter, Sally Lloyd, at the other end of the village. There were three children, but Mrs. Lloyd being the only one on the ground was naturally the one upon whom fell the burden of care, and that at a long distance from her own home, which every one must admit was try-

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ing. Sally found it all of that when the crisis was over and she had time to reflect (as she did increasingly) that John also was their child, and the one upon whom the hard-earned savings of the family had been expended. John had prospered, was married, and lived in the city. It had always rankled in Sally's breast that John had had the opportunities and she the burdens. Mary Zimmerman, the younger sister, being an itinerant minister's wife with a large family, was almost eliminated from the case, so far as her power to give them anything but love was concerned.

When the father was out of danger, but still in that lifeless, impassive state that often follows typhoid, Sally called

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a family conclave and put it up to them bluntly:

What was to be done with the old people?

Why need there be any change? John had asked with a man's obtuseness, thereby laying an inadvertent touch upon bare nerves. And Sally told him succinctly. It was a painful interview. Sally came to it with worn-out nerves, an aching back, and a grievance; John with generous impulses, a man's helplessness (beyond money matters), and the prudent remembrance of a wife who was only an "in-law"; and poor Mary Zimmerman with a big heart, indeed, but freighted with pinching poverty, many mouths to fill, and the itinerancy.

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John proposed a nurse at his expense who should eventually become the housekeeper and care for them as long as they lived; to which Sally had answered (having her own aching back and her sister-in-law's ease in mind) that they should never be turned off to hirelings while *she* lived! She had only thought that after all the sacrifices that had been made for John, he and his wife would be willing—etc., etc. Goaded thus, John Maxon consented against his better judgment to the breaking up, and offered to take the old people to his home and care for them—provided his wife consented.

It was a prudent proviso. When the case, with Sally's arguments, was presented to Lilian in her city home, she

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promptly repudiated her obligation in favor of the daughters. She would take one, she said, but not both. There must be a division of the care.

Then it was that the real tragedy began; for Sally, stung by this, declared there would be a division! Her mother should never be an unwelcome guest in anybody's house—certainly not in her own son's. What began with an aching back and overwrought nerves now became a deadly quarrel, for if "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city," what shall we say of two sisters-in-law, neither of whom wishes to be won?

Between the upper and nether millstones the unhappy couple was ground to submission. The old man, dazed

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and impotent, was carried away to John's city home; while the wife, who had always leaned on his strength, was left at Sally's. The house was leased for two years, furnished.

According to Sally, this illness was her father's final breakdown. But it is not in man, nor even in woman, to foretell God's times and seasons. It might have been easier for them all if things had gone according to Sally's program. But in time the lethargy of the typhoid was overcome; the veil was lifted from his naturally strong mind, and vigor came back to his frame. Then the genial city physician assured him after a final examination that he was good for ten years yet. The old man heard him with dismay.

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John Maxon was very good to his father, and so in her way was Lilian. They took him to ride in the automobile, and sometimes to moving-picture shows. John even offered once to take him to church.

"No!" the veteran said, to John's unspeakable surprise. "I've served my God for sixty years, and He has forgotten me in my old age! I'll not go into His house!"

It was the only protest he ever made; he seldom spoke his wife's name; but they all knew as time went by that they had done a wicked thing. They would have righted it if it had been in their power, but John could not propose a change for fear of misconstruction; and neither Sally nor Lilian

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would be the first to "give in," for the devils of pride and obstinacy and misunderstanding were rampant now, and these are they which go not out save by prayer and humiliation of spirit! But they were none of them happy.

When the Christmas season drew near they realized that it was the fiftieth anniversary as well, and Sally had written to John saying that it did not seem right to let it go unnoticed. Would not he and Lilian come down for a home celebration, bringing Father with them? Sally felt very virtuous when this letter was mailed.

In this plan John heartily acquiesced by the first mail, and Lilian (also feeling virtuous) added a note, courteously approving and saying that

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while it would not be possible for her to be there she would send down fifty yellow roses in honor of the day. Sally's contribution was to be a "sunshine" cake, set round with fifty candles. Wise daughters! Surely the sore hearts of any reasonable old couple ought to be healed by "sunshine" cake, fifty candles, and half a hundred fragrant roses!

Father had come down ahead of John; Sally, with Mr. Lloyd, had gone to the city for some last purchases; Mary Zimmerman and her husband and John were coming to-night; and to-morrow was the golden wedding.

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III

UPON the ears of the little old woman in the kitchen fell a rasping sound that was strangely familiar. She listened and then stepped to the door.

"Why, Father! If you ain't sawing wood!"

"She didn't seem to have much," he explained rather sheepishly. "A place needs a man around. And, Mother, it feels right down good to get my hands on things again. If I had a screw-driver I would fix that shutter."

She went into the kitchen and came back triumphant. "Here it is. Just where we left it! I'll help you."

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They took an almost childish pleasure in the work.

"You always loved tools, Father," she said when they sat down in the sitting-room afterward. "That was why I sent yours up to you. Did you use them much?"

He shook his head.

"Marthy, there's no more chance to drive a nail around John's house than into a tombstone. I take the tools out and look at them sometimes, but that's all."

"Oh, Father!"

"You see, it is different in the city, Marthy. There's no nails to drive, and no raking to do, and no snow paths to make. And the worst is there is no wood and water to bring."

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She looked at him with commiseration written on every feature. "Ain't there any chores at all you can do?"

"Not a thing! When they want heat they turn a wheel, and when they want water they turn a spigot; so there's——"

"But, Father, how can you warm your feet by turning a wheel?"

"You can't! There's no place in that house you can warm your feet."

"Couldn't you in the kitchen?"

"The kitchen? Why, Marthy, the kitchen in John's house ain't anything in the world but a place to cook. Well, one night when they were both gone out I got to thinking how good it would seem to toast my feet once more before I died——"

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"Oh, Father!"

"—and I made up my mind to try it. I went down to the library, where there's a grate, and took off my shoes,—I had on them gray yarn socks you sent me,—and put my feet up on the fender. I guess I must have dropped off, for all at once I opened my eyes and there was a lot of people had come in, and—and Lilian got so red—and——"

"Did she say anything?"

"No. Didn't need to. I got into my shoes and—well, I never have done it since."

"Father," she pleaded, "take off your shoes now and put your feet up like you used to! It will make you feel better."

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He shook his head. "There ain't time for that."

"Father," she questioned then, half fearful of the answer, "Lilian is good to you, ain't she?"

"Ye-es, she's good to me. But, Marthy, I don't fit in John's city house. I'm big and lumbering and in the way. They don't mean to make me feel so, but I know I am. I'm always doin' things,—spilling coffee (you know my hand shakes now)—or eatin' with my knife—or using the wrong fork (it's mighty confusing to have to choose amongst 'em). And once, when they had some people there to dinner, I got interested in what a man was telling and I says, 'Well, by gosh!' I says, right out loud like that. I didn't mean

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anything by it. I said it just like they say, 'By George!' or 'By Jove!'—but somehow it sounded different. The man didn't care. He seemed pleased. But I could see in a minute that it mortified Lilian. Since then I've had them bring my supper up to me when they have company for dinner. It's safer. And it's better, anyway. You see, they kinder match 'em up in couples, and I'm always the odd one.—But you are contented, Mother?" he said abruptly. "I couldn't stand it if you were unhappy."

"Oh, Father!" she said, breaking down, "they're good to me, but I am lonesome for you! And I'm homesick for the old place. Sally means to do right—we have good children—but—

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nobody needs me now. Sally still comes to me about things—she says she wants me to feel that it is my home as much as it's hers—but then things always go her way! Now, about this dinner to-morrow. Sally asked me what I wanted to have for dessert, and I told her mince pies. But she wanted plum pudding."

"Well?"

"Well—it's going to be pudding! And, Father, I wanted those pies. I have had mince pies every Christmas since we were married, and I didn't want to break the record."

He got up and strode back and forth. He knew the pies were a vital matter. When he spoke, his voice shook.

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"Never mind, Mother! You won't have to stand it always. When this blamed lease is out I'm coming home —and you are coming with me. They can't shut us up, you in one coop and me in another! I won't stand it! We haven't lived our lives out yet. I'm only seventy-five and you are four years younger. There's years ahead of us yet, and by gum! we're entitled to 'em!"

He paused at her side then and went on encouragingly. "Hold on a little longer, Mother! A year from next March we'll be here to stay. I would do it to-day if it was not for that lease."

"Oh, Father, if we only could! But how would you do about the money to live on?"

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He stroked his chin, the flow of words momentarily checked. "I don't quite know yet. But I'll manage it! There's my pension."

"If we had a cow," she said eagerly, "I could still make butter, and sell some."

"John would give us a cow, Marthy. John's generous."

"And it wouldn't take much for us to live on, Father, two old people like us. It isn't as if I didn't know how to manage."

"You are a good manager, all right," he told her, and a pink flush crept to her cheek as it did once on a time when he used to tell her she was beautiful. "The garden would help," he went on. "We could raise the year's potatoes on

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this place, and"—he straightened himself—"I'm good for it, Mother."

"Yes, and with my chickens and eggs——"

"And we could have a pig."

"Oh, Amos!" she cried, going back to the name she had called him before he was "Father," "like the one we went to housekeeping with!"

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IV

WHEN Mrs. Dobson returned at last, they were planning it all exactly as they had done fifty years before.

"I've been trying for several days to see your son-in-law about the place," she said when the greetings were over.

"What's wanted about the place?" He stiffened, as landlords do in such cases by instinct.

"I want to see if I can't give it up."

If a chariot of fire had dropped at their feet ready to take them to the land of pure delight, they would not have been more astonished—nor one half so thankful.

"Oh, Father!"

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He rose quietly and stood between his wife and his tenant, making an imperative gesture behind his back. "Isn't this sudden?"

"Yes, it is, though I've been trying to see your son-in-law. If you could attend to it now——"

"I can," he said with dignity. "The place is mine. When did you want to give it up?"

"Right away." Mrs. Dobson felt that the situation was rapidly clearing. "You see, my son-in-law is sick and has been ordered to California, and they want me to go with them. I'm going for the winter, anyway; my trunks are at the depot now. But if I could give the house up, I would go to stay."

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"HE ROSE QUIETLY AND STOOD BETWEEN HIS WIFE AND HIS TENANT."

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"Haven't you a two-year lease?" he asked sternly.

"Yes, I have," admitted Mrs. Dobson, to whom leases seemed suddenly to have become as binding as death sentences, "but I thought maybe you might let me off."

There was a gasping sound back of him.

"Mrs. Dobson, will you be kind enough to get my wife some water? She is not feeling well."

Left alone with her, he raised a warning finger. "Now, Marthy, you keep quiet! I'll manage this. I've watched real estate agents enough to know how it's done. . . . No'm, nothing serious, I think. If she could lie down on the lounge here and keep

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perfectly quiet, she'll soon feel better. Now, about giving up the place —it is next year, you mean? You would pay the rest of this year's rent, of course?"

"Why, ye-es," agreed Mrs. Dobson, somewhat reluctantly. She had been directed by her son-in-law to do this, but feeling that two months' rent would be a convenient sum to save at the outset of a journey, and that the old soldier would probably be easier than an agent, she had tightened her grip upon it.

"I couldn't consider it otherwise."

Her fingers relaxed. "Yes, I'll pay that. I have the money right here." He still looked uncompromising, and she hastened to add: "There are some

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things I would throw in, too. There's the cow——"

"Is she fresh?"

"Yes. Nice calf."

He still looked dubious. "I don't hardly think I could do it. A lease is as binding as a subpœna—or a writ of mandamus."

The hair of Mrs. Dobson's flesh rose. She had a child's fear of the law. But the train was to go at five o'clock.

"There's the wood," she faltered. "I'd put that in."

"Beech and maple?"

"I don't know. It's just wood."

"I guess I'd about as soon you'd take that," he said judicially.

Mrs. Dobson looked at the clock. The carriage was coming at half-past

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four. "And there's my winter potatoes. I'd let them go in."

"H-m! Are they Early Rose?"

"I don't know," — impatiently. "They are just plain potatoes. But they're good." Then, perceiving that he was moved by this, "I would leave my mincemeat for your wife, too, if she likes pies. All ready to use."

Again there was a gasp from the couch and again he bent over her. "Lay still, Mother. Don't try to talk —or anything. You'll soon feel better."

The dicker went on,—and so did the time. There was but little left for her; but he had all there was, which gave him the advantage. When it was over, the offerings in the shape of bonus were as

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numerous and varied as the collection that distended the pockets of Tom Sawyer when his whitewashing contract was finished. Before the carriage came the lease had been committed to the flames, and all of Mrs. Dobson's non-portable effects were the property of the superannuated financier.

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V

SALLY LLOYD and her husband came back from the city with their purchases by the evening train; and John Maxon, bearing the fifty roses, was with them. They were joined later by Mr. and Mrs. Zimmerman at a near-by station. The Christmas spirit had got into their hearts, and it was a softened family that went up to the Lloyd home. They were met at the door with startling news.

The old people were missing!

They had gone out after dinner, Norah said, and had not been seen since; at least, Mrs. Maxon hadn't.

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The old gentleman had come about an hour ago and taken away a trunk and two suit-cases.

"Their things they had packed to go home with you, Mary, for a little visit!" cried Sally. "But before Christmas! Before the golden wedding! Why, they must have lost their senses!"

"Maybe not," said Mr. Zimmerman, quietly. "Did they leave any letters?"

Norah produced two, one for John and one for Sally. John tore his open.

"It's from Father," he said, and read it through three times before speaking further. Then he read aloud:

"My dear Son:

"I have had a chance to take back the old place at a bargain, and I have

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done it. We think it is best to be in our own home. Don't worry about us. We will get along. There's my pension, you know."

John's voice broke. The pension was thirteen dollars a month.

"Your mother is looking for you all out to dinner to-morrow. And, my son, this is settled.

"Your aff. father,

"Amos Maxon."

Mr. Zimmerman and Sally's husband exchanged understanding glances. Neither had approved the "breaking up" of the old people, but both had prudently refrained from saying so.

"What is yours, Sally?" demanded Mrs. Zimmerman.

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"It's from Mother. Read it, Mary. I can't." Sally's face was buried in her handkerchief. And Mary read:

"DEAR SALLY:—

"We have concluded to go back home, Father and me have. You and John have been mighty good to us, but we want to be together the rest of the time. It won't be long. And we thought if we were going to do it at all it would be better just to go quietly to-day, without any words about it. We wanted to be in the old home for to-morrow and have you all come out to dinner, just as you used to. Mrs. Dobson has left things so I can. She's going to California. But I'll tell you about that to-morrow. And, daughter, don't let's have any talk about it.

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Father is sort of set against that, and it wouldn't be pleasant. It would spoil the day.

"Affectionately,

"MOTHER.

"P.S.—You can cook the turkey and bring it out if you want to, but don't bring the pudding. I am going to have mince pies."

When Mary stopped reading, Sally's eyes were still buried in her handkerchief and John's cast to the ground. It was the discreet Mr. Lloyd who relieved the tension of the moment.

"Eloped, by George!" he cried. "But ready for our blessing!"

Then they all laughed hysterically.

When they were quieted down, Mr.

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Lloyd, now aroused, spoke with some directness. "Now I have a word to say. Zimmerman and I have kept out of this because it was not our fight. But I want to tell you right now that they have done the sensible thing, and we'd better fall right in line without any words about it, as they particularly request. John and I will stand back of them financially, and——"

"I'll do that without help," said John, hastily. "I have always been willing to do it. But personal care——"

"I'll give them all the personal care they need," sobbed Sally, now thoroughly broken down, "and be glad to do it. I haven't had a moment's real

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happiness since I separated them. Yes, it was, John, it was more my fault than Lilian's, and I'm willing to say so!"

"Don't let's try to apportion the blame, or discuss it any more," said Mary Zimmerman, quickly. "We made a mistake"—generously assuming a part of it that was not hers—"but we have found it out before it is too late, fortunately. Let's not say a single word to spoil the day for them. Ernest and I will go out to-night, and then I will be there early in the morning to help Mother, and——"

"And I'll cook the turkey here and take it out," said Sally, wiping her eyes. To a woman of Sally Lloyd's type there is always relief in action.

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After dinner that night John Maxon sought the nearest drug store, ignoring the telephone in his brother-in-law's house, and held a lengthy conversation with his wife over the "long distance." At its close he said:—

"All right! I'll meet you at the station. And, dearest, nothing you could do would make me so happy!"

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VI

WHEN they sat down to that Christmas feast the children were all there, Lilian with the rest. There had been no word either of remonstrance or explanation. They had simply come home as usual.

On the board was Sally's turkey, and all the good things that Mrs. Dobson's renounced larder afforded, with a centerpiece of fifty "gold of Ophir" roses. Before the happy, tear-dimmed eyes of the "bride" blazed fifty candles representing golden years, and at the patriarch's right hand was a plate, gold-banded, of fifty shining dollars. On the top lay a folded slip of paper.

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The veteran took it up with a trembling hand, and his lips moved wordlessly.

"Use them freely, Father," the paper read. "There will be fifty more each month. John."

The scarred face worked convulsively. He pushed back his chair at last and stood up. No one spoke or looked at him, for every head was bowed, every heart full.

" 'My cup runneth over,' " he said, his eyes raised to heaven. " 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.' "

Then, stretching out his hands over the bowed heads,

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"HE PUSHED BACK HIS CHAIR AT LAST AND STOOD UP."

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GOLDEN WEDDING

"For the bounty Thou hast spread before us, for all Thy loving kindness and tender mercies through fifty years, and for our good children—we thank Thee, O Lord! Amen."

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